

THIS BALKANIZED CITY

The five boroughs of New York are jealous rival States; their feuds are the imponderables of city politics. Wanted: A comprehensive entente cordiale.

By HENRY R. LIEBERMAN

AS inhabitants of the mother borough of New York, glamorous-conscious Manhattanites long ago arrogated to themselves the right to look down upon the other boroughs and poke fun at the provincialisms of their "unfortunate" residents.

To many Manhattanites, for example, Queens represents a great wilderness reclaimed by the World's Fair; Brooklyn an extensive maze populated by inoffensive souls who go in for rubber plants, baby carriages, testimonial dinners and churches; the Bronx the backyard of Manhattan, where the English language undergoes special abuse and the subway comes up for air, and Richmond a mysterious islet somewhere off the Jersey coast, where some people go on hot nights to cool off, but which is virtually inaccessible after 1 o'clock in the morning.

This civic superiority complex, arising originally from Manhattan's financial, economic and cultural dominance and kept alive by glorious fables created by newspaper columnists, the "slickies" and the movies, is not so well defined as it used to be, but it still exists. That was manifest only recently when Borough President James J. Lyons, the voice and conscience of the Bronx, sought to satirize the land-grabbing propensities of the European dictators by laying claim to Marble Hill, forty-eight acres of city blocks which lie in Manhattan politically and in the Bronx geographically.

With the 5,000 residents of Marble Hill the Lyons "Putsch" was no joking matter. Almost to the last man, woman and child they protested loudly, passionately. Why did the Marble Hillians object with such vehemence to the proposed "Anschluss"? A few tried to explain on the logical ground that it would mean higher taxes. But, for the most part, the widespread opposition seemed to spring, psychologically, from a deep-rooted con-

viction that Manhattan is God's chosen borough and that the neighboring boroughs are merely satellites.

The territorial controversy revealed that New York is psychologically, as well as politically, a federation of five large communities, each with an individual flavor and each composed of inhabitants whose local pride has been developed to the point of chauvinism in a constant war of interborough rivalry.

TAKE the average middle-class citizen of each borough and put all five in a room, and the outsider will never be able to tell the difference. He will find that all wear the same clothing, each makes from \$25 to \$45 a week, each votes the Democratic ticket, each has a tendency to say "sawr" instead of "saw" and "erl-boiner" instead of "oil-burner" and each works in Manhattan though he may live in another borough. But, withal, each believes he has something on the other fellow because he lives in Manhattan (Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx or Staten Island).

The Manhattanite chides the others as cousins-german to the rural hick, the country Hiram. Against this common foe the others present a united front. All behold him, half disdainfully and half sympathetically, as a shackled urban slave, insensitive to the fetters that bind him and still to be uplifted by fresh air and green grass. But the united front breaks down on the relative merits of the atmosphere and shrubbery in Kew Gardens, Flatbush, Woodlawn and Great Kills.

No one knows exactly when New York's borough feuds began. But they date 'way back before the era of rapid transit, when to go from Manhattan to the other boroughs was like taking a trip to the Gaspé peninsula. Sectional antipathies have long existed not only between boroughs but between communities in the same borough.

Historically, each of the boroughs is a conglomeration of small villages merged in the process of urban development. The same rivalry which exists today between Manhattan and Brooklyn once existed within Brooklyn, say, between Gowanus and Canarsie. Or, for that matter, between Kingsbridge and West Farms in the Bronx. Consolidation of the villages into boroughs merely enlarged the battlefields.

ECONOMIC and social statuses are the fundamental factors governing interborough relationships. At one time group attitudes were based directly on economic and social distinctions. But New York social psychology took a geographical turn with the extension of rapid transit facilities.

As subway lines brought the boroughs closer together, there was an exodus of population from Manhattan. Instead of eliminating group lines, population migrations merely established group branches in the neighboring boroughs. Like followed like in the flight from Manhattan. Lower East Side tenement dwellers flocked to Brownsville and the East Bronx. Little Italys and Harlems sprang up around new subway stations. Economically, neighborhoods were plot-

ted out on the basis of pay checks and rent levels; socially, on the basis of common racial origins, religious beliefs, interests and habits of thought.

Aside from economic and social distinctions, there are at least seven other factors which seem to govern interborough relationships. Briefly, these are (1) Manhattan's supremacy, real and illusory, and the desire of all New Yorkers to associate themselves with the symbol of its glamour; (2) the failure of the other boroughs to match Manhattan's brilliance and the deadly comparisons made between them; (3) civic competition; (4) time and space, or the comparative difficulty of reaching destinations outside Manhattan and the reluctance of the New Yorker to travel; (5) negative stereotypes evoked in mental pictures of the other boroughs; (6) unesthetic geographical nomenclature in two boroughs, and (7) resentment in the other boroughs toward the Manhattanite's superiority complex and his slurs on his neighbors.

LET us look more closely at these seven factors governing relationships among the boroughs.

Manhattan's Supremacy—Fact and

fancy condition the civic superiority complex of the Manhattanite. First of all, he derives no little pride from the fact that his borough is America's leading metropolis, its financial- and cultural capital, its city-est city. Manhattan is the smallest of the boroughs—one-fifth as large as Queens, one-fourth as large as Brooklyn, less than one-half as large as Staten Island and one-half as large as the Bronx. Its population is one million less than Brooklyn's 2,798,000. Still, New York is New York because of Manhattan. And the most chauvinistic Brooklynite often concedes its supremacy when in going to Manhattan he says, unconsciously, he is "going to New York."

But more important than actual fact is the glamour myth compounded by the Broadway columnists, the magazine writers and the movies. To the entire country New York (i. e., Manhattan) is a glittering, awe-inspiring, wonderful city, and persons living in and around it

try to borrow a mystical power from the magic of its name. The filling station attendant in Plainfield, the factory worker in Passaic, the stenographer in Camden insist that they are New Yorkers. The Brooklynite who visits his relatives in St. Louis wants to be introduced as a New Yorker and not as a Brooklynite. The Manhattanite, because he spends twenty-four hours each day in the "borough of boroughs," likes to feel that he absorbs more of its mysterious power than any of the others.

Deadly Comparisons—Each of the boroughs, with the exception of Richmond, would undoubtedly receive due recognition as being among the country's ten greatest cities if not for its proximity to Manhattan. All have industrial, commercial and recreational facilities entitling them to be known as important urban centers. But each wilts by comparison with Manhattan. When the visitor to New York departs and formulates his impressions of the city he sees four of the boroughs as amorphous masses of people, houses and small stores, too much like his own city to cause excitement. But Manhattan to him is a series of vivid, sharply defined mental pictures—Broadway, Times Square, the subway rush, the Empire State Building, Wall Street, Radio City, Fifth Avenue, Harlem. One city among many.

Civic Competition—As members of the same family, all five boroughs are at constant odds over the civic dispensations

of Father Knickerbocker. Each is a bellicose contender for streets, highways, sewers, bridges, parks and monuments. When Manhattan, the favorite child, gets a new civic improvement the other boroughs, feeling that it has been obtained at their expense, sulk and complain that they are wrongfully treated as the forgotten stepchildren of the family. And, more often than not, fur flies.

Time and Space—The Manhattanite assigns more than the usual importance to time and space. He likes to get where he is going. Although he spends a fair portion of his life in the subway, nobody has ever accused him of being a willing traveler. If it takes more than a half-hour to get somewhere, there must be an extra special reason for going there. This is true not only of the Manhattanite but of all New Yorkers. Friendship and romance are governed by the time it takes to get from one place to another. The otherwise dutiful son in Kew Gardens balks at visiting his mother in the East Bronx because of the long subway ride involved.

LOVE may laugh at locksmiths, but not at distance. When the young man from Manhattan meets the young lady from Brooklyn, attractive though she be, he first makes sure that she doesn't live "too far out" before making plans to see her again. Find the successful romance between the boy from Far Rockaway and the girl from Staten Island and there you have a love that puts the love of Heloise and Abelard to shame.

Mental Pictures—Without knowing any of the neighboring boroughs thoroughly, many Manhattanites have definite, preconceived notions of what each is like. Almost invariably, the preconception is not complimentary. Seldom does it square with actual fact.

To the Manhattanite, Brooklyn has always been the "bedroom of New York" and the "Borough of Churches." Vaudevillians, cartoonists and the movies have fostered the notion that Brooklyn is a vast, flat, lifeless place; a slough of

despond; the Siberia of urban communities.

Gags like the following have fanned the flames of civic strife:

Q. "Why was the subway extended to Brooklyn?" A. "So a man could go there without being seen."

Q. "Why does a girl leave home?" A. "Usually because she was born in Brooklyn."

Q. "Where is Brooklyn located?" A. "Between pleasure and the grave, being bounded on one side by Manhattan and on the other by Greenwood Cemetery."

Brooklyn is a home community with an air of permanence about it. All that is necessary to experience Brooklyn's charm is to visit Park Slope or Flatbush with an open mind. Unfortunately, not many Manhattanites ever go to Flatbush in that condition.

TO the Manhattanite, the Bronx—with a history almost as old as that of Manhattan and once suggested by Lewis Morris, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, for the capital of the United States—represents the antithesis of background and culture. If there is one feature of the borough which should stand out as a stereotype, that feature is its parks. The Bronx has more park acreage than any other borough (4,563 acres), not to mention the foremost zoo in the country. But to the Manhattanite the borough represents a dingy community of apartment houses and tenements, where the Socialist takes precedence over the socialite, where chopped chicken liver is the monotonous Sunday fare and where the children yearn to grow up so they can have apartments of their own in Manhattan.

The Manhattanite regards the Bronx as neither a home nor an urban community, but a limbo between both. Four-fifths of the Bronx's families live in apartment houses. Only 10 per cent own their own homes, compared with 33 per cent in Brooklyn, 45 per cent in Queens and over 50 per cent in Richmond. The figure for Manhattan is as low as 2 per cent.

Except for a few sparse remarks about the Queens "wilderness," the Manhattanite pokes little or no fun at its residents or at the borough itself. In the first place, Queens is growing too fast for Manhattanites to crystallize their attitudes toward it. Secondly, it is where many of them would like to rear their children if they had a chance to leave Manhattan. As the most recently developed of the home boroughs, it is newer, brighter, fresher. Then, too, the average Queens citizen most closely approximates the stereotype of the typical, middle-class American.

TAKING Queens home-owners by occupations, 38 per cent are city, State or Federal employees, 22 per cent skilled artisans, 14 per cent professionals, 12 per cent public utility employees and 14 per cent miscellaneous. As described by the Queens Chamber of Commerce, the average home-owner is 38 years old, his wife 32; he (Continued on Page 20)



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makes from \$45 to \$100 a week; spends between \$5,000 and \$6,000 for his home; has an automobile but no servant.

Like Queens, Richmond has escaped most of the deadly shafts aimed by Manhattanites at Brooklyn and the Bronx, but for another reason. The average Manhattanite knows little about it. Many sweltering Gothamites take the twenty-minute ferry ride to Staten Island in the Summer months to cool off, but they come right back on the next ferry. To the Manhattanite who thinks that he knows something about Staten Island, Richmond is a borough of weeds, farms and breweries, where baseball is second to bowling. Actually, with a varied topography of rounded hills, valleys, sand dunes, marshlands, inlets and bays, Richmond resembles early New York and has no peer among the boroughs for natural beauty.

Geographic Names—There is more in a name than Shakespeare imagined. Psychologically, a rose by another name, may not smell as sweet. Take Hoboken, Ho-Ho-Kus, Weehawken and Oshkosh. With softer, more esthetic names these cities might perhaps have got into the urban social register. And so with Brooklyn and the Bronx.

Brooklyn suffers more because of the names of some of its constituent communities than because of its own. "Brooklyn" is the final evolutionary form of the Dutch name once borne by the village of Breuckelen. There are twenty-five other Brooklyns in the United States, and if the New York "Brooklyn" evokes a negative reaction it must be because it has become associated with the stereotype of that borough.

THE Bronx takes its name from Jonas Bronck, a "Swede or Dane," who settled at the mouth of the river now bearing his name in 1641. It is the only borough which has the article "the" in its name because it is known after Jonas Bronck's family — the Broncks. There are six Mannhattans in the gazetteer, six Queenses, two Staten Islands, but only one Bronx.

Superiority Complex — Intense local patriotism flourishes in each of the five boroughs. Where the residents of the four "satellite" boroughs are concerned, it represents a desire to win recognition for their respective communities and a reaction to the dominance of Manhattan and the superiority complex of the Mannhattanite. In short, the will to power and defense mechanism.

One evidence of the local patriotism of the Brooklynite is his unflagging loyalty to his baseball team, the Brooklyn Dodgers. Small matter that the Dodgers end the season in the second division. Occasionally, they turn back the New York Giants. And that means almost as much as a pennant in Brooklyn. The Brooklynite becomes poetic not only over his greenery and his baseball team but over all the civic features of his borough. In his estimation, there is little to choose between the Metropolitan Opera and the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Macy's and Abraham & Straus, Central Park and Prospect Park.

The Bronx also presents an interesting study in defense mechanisms. To combat the notion that his borough is lacking in cul-

ture, the resident of the Bronx refers to it as the "Borough of Universities." (New York and Fordham Universities, as well as Manhattan College and a branch of Hunter College, are situated in the borough.) He also has a comeback when the Bronx is libeled as the "backyard of Mannhattan." His rebuttal is that the Bronx is the only borough on the mainland and, therefore, not only the front door of Manhattan but the only borough in the United States.

IN at least two respects the superior attitude of the Mannhattanite toward the other boroughs is difficult to understand. First of all, the population of his island has been dropping steadily, that of all the other boroughs rising. Since 1910 Mannhattan's population has decreased by 28 per cent, while that of Queens has increased by 372 per cent, the Bronx 247 per cent, Staten Island 105 per cent and Brooklyn 71 per cent.

Secondly, the percentage of out-of-towners in Mannhattan's population is greater than in any of the other boroughs. Using 1930



McLaughlin Air Service

Pride of Manhattan—The financial district.

census figures, 23 per cent of Gotham's inhabitants were born in the United States outside New York State. This compares with 6 per cent in the Bronx, 9 per cent in Brooklyn, 11 per cent in Queens and 14 per cent in Staten Island. Moreover, since the "satellite" boroughs are more like other American cities than Mannhattan, the out-of-towner is more easily assimilated as a member of the community. The out-of-towner brings his home-town pride to

New York and usually loses it in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island. Not so in Mannhattan. He is constantly harping on the virtues of Atlanta, Spokane, Memphis or Waco. "Back where I came from" is his constant refrain.

As the "satellite" boroughs continue to drain off Mannhattan's migrating population the Mannhattanite finds less and less opportunity to gloat over his neighbors.